Dog Days Bring Distant Thunder

The oppressive dog days of August bring the discomfort and monotony of seemingly endless high temperatures, until toward evening the spell is broken by the faint rumble of distant thunder. Then the ominous appearance of cumulonimbus thunderhead clouds over the horizon to the west confirms impending meteorological developments. Our threatening weather patterns consistently seem to be formed in the direction of the Hudson River Valley, as if the geological formations act as a staging area for the fireworks of lightning bolts and claps of thunder. There they echo and roll back and forth across the river all the way down from Storm King Mountain to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in the legendary literary land of Washington Irving.The atmospheric interference that Irving seeded into his stories of headless horsemen and Rip Van Winkle may have been inspired by the intensity of the sound effects, amplified over the river as they reverberate against the backdrop of the Ramapo foothills formed by the Wisconsin Glacier.

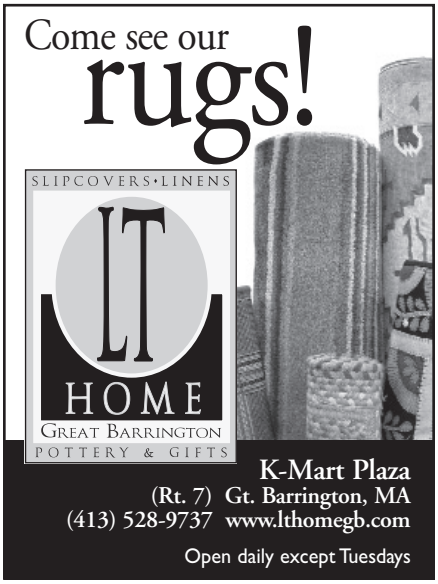
It was in the Ramapo foothills, looking out towards the Hudson River Valley that I buried my old dog, a Gordon setter, under the May flowers in a stand of mountain laurel. Although it was forty years ago, I like to picture him sleeping like Rip Van Winkle, even though he will not be woken up by the sound of little old men with white beards and pointed hats bowling with ten pins up in the clouds.

Gordon Setters are black and tan gun dogs developed by the Duke Of Gordon in Scotland. They came from the highlands around Edinburgh Castle, the stormy setting for Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in which the violence of thunder and lightning is the backdrop for the plot. To this very day historic rituals at the castle include firing a gun at one p.m. when the sun is over the yardarm and the wail of a lone piper high in the turrets when the day is over.

The first Gordon setters in this country were brought by Daniel Webster to find grouse in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. My Gordon came from the Animal Rescue League in the suburbs, but when we moved into the Ramapos, I wondered to what extent his breeding and ancestry might revert him into a hunting dog. I would walk down into the valley to take the train into New York, and my neighbors told me my dog followed from a distance, and after I left they would see him hunting by himself through the hills.

However in the hot weather he would rest on the front porch of the little gardener's cottage we rented. The cottage was remote but near a picturesque hamlet called Tuxedo, so hidden away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the world that people who moved away and came back to visit would say it seemed to be immune to change with the passage of time, like the mythical village of Brigadoon.

Sometimes as my dog lay there, he would look up as If startled by a sound from woods across the way. A dog's hearing is more acute than our own, but if I listened carefully, I could also hear a feathery tattoo, very faint and spasmodic at the start, then gaining in cadence and volume. The drumming of a male grouse, made by capturing pockets of air between its wings and body, is like a roll of distant thunder, often not clearly identified in the



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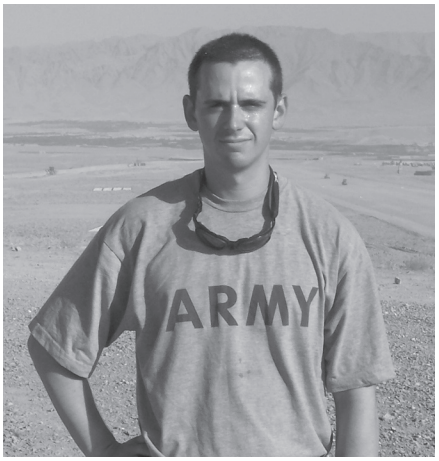
conscious mind until after the audible vibration has already subsided.

We can get a sense of environmental awareness by watching other living creatures, both domestic and wild. Like human beings, animals and birds react to atmospheric disturbance. It might also be said that our weather and other meteorological phenomena connect us to both heaven and earth at the same time. The human experience and artistic interpretation in the New World as well as from old countries across the sea have over the years left us a treasure of related literature. So I will take a page from the imagination of great writers already mentioned to finish my article.

Often when my dog was sleeping, his legs would twitch and he would whine. Watching this, we would say he was running in his sleep. Most setters are also compulsive wanderers. At the end of a hot August day, when a roll of distant thunder sounds like the drumbeat of a grouse and a gust of wind through a crag in the Ramapos wails like a piper high in the turret of a castle … like Rip Van Winkle sleeping all these years, his spirit might be aroused. Although never to be seen again, except in a flash of lightning, he is somewhere up there, near where I left him, running in a dream, and hunting through the hills.

— George Emmons



Welcome Home Specialist Lewis

On Sunday, July 9, Karen and Steven Lewis honored their son Ryan with a welcome home gathering at their home on Stevens Lake in Monterey.

Ryan, a Boston University graduate, has been in the US Army Signal Corp and was home on a two-week leave from Afghanistan, where he specializes in computer support. Ryan is scheduled for an additional six months in Afghanistan prior to returning to his base at Fort Drum, New York. Previously, he also served in Iraq and Germany. Upon completion of his military duties, Ryan plans to attend Brandeis University for graduate work in religious studies.

Forty friends and neighbors helped celebrate. Ryan's military career was highlighted with a high-tech slide show. Guido's Marketplace made an exquisite, delicious sheet cake replica of the American flag. When they learned it was for an American serviceman on home leave they refused to take payment.

Thank you, Guido's!

— Hy Rosen

Bidwell House Hosts Photography Show

The Bidwell House Museum is hosting a photography show featuring the works of 2004 Williams College graduate and Lee Resident Michelle Cuevas. The wine and cheese opening reception was held July 29. The show will remain in the museum's Carriage House Gallery through August 12.

The Bidwell House Museum is located at 100 Art School Road in Monterey. For more information call 413-528-6888.

The New Marlborough Village Association presents
6 SATURDAYS: MUSIC • FILM • AUTHORS

m music and more 06

AUG 12 at 4:30 pm • Writing on Air
Radio adventures and misadventures with **Gregory Whitehead**, an internationally renowned writer, director and producer of radio plays, essays and acoustic adventures. Lively, funny, engaging and provocative.

AUG 19 at 7 pm • Film: *The Burning Wall*
The filmmaker, **Hava Beller**, will be present to introduce this film that begins in the ashes of World War II and ends with the fall of the Berlin Wall.
"Inescapably touching" –The New York Times

AUG 26 at 4:30 pm • Berkshire Writers' Free for All *IT'S FREE! Hosted by Jon Swan.* A distinguished group of writers who have chosen the Berkshires as home present their latest work.

SEPT 9 at 4:30 pm • Concert: The Russians Are Coming! Music by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Taneyev, Khachaturian, Prokofiev and Stravinsky performed by **Jack Brown, baritone; William Hagenah, clarinet; Harold Lewin, piano;** and the **Forster Trio.**

SEPT 16 at 4:30 pm • Manhattan String Quartet Music by Beethoven, Dvorak and Shostakovich. Hailed by Michael Steinberg of the *Boston Globe* as "a national treasure."

SEPT 30 at 4:30 pm • Award-Winning Authors Hosted by **Mitchel Levitas** of *The New York Times.* Three outstanding American authors discuss recently published work: **Charles C. Mann**, *1491*; **George Packer**, *The Assassins' Gate*; and **Karen Russell**, *St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves.*

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